

MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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A History of Metzlers Mennonite Congregation

By ROBERT B. WENGER

This article is an attempt to briefly relate the history of Metzlers Mennonite Church from its beginning in 1827 to the present date. Metzlers is located in West Earl Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. It is situated close to the road leading from Akron to Farmersville, approximately halfway between these two points. Originally Metzlers was a part of the Weaverland-Groffdale District of Lancaster Conference, but when the District was divided in 1939 it became a part of the Groffdale section. The membership at present consists of slightly more than two hundred persons.

The Founding of the Congregation

To understand the earliest history of the congregation one has to note the ancestry and biographies of those who were instrumental in founding it. Valentine Metzler, the European ancestor of the Mennonite Metzlers, was born February 24, 1726 in Switzerland, and died July 24, 1783, in Pennsylvania. His parental home was a Christian one which had undergone much persecution. He came to America in 1738, at the age of twelve years, with his father Yost Metzler. The father apparently died soon afterwards, leaving the son an orphan. They arrived at Philadelphia with a group of 343 Palatine Mennonites and settled in Hans Herr's haven in "Penn's Woods."

Valentine married Anna Nisli (Nissley), third and youngest daughter of Jacob Nissley, from near Lancaster City, on December 19, 1749. They began life together in the Landis Valley District, the area due east of Lancaster City. Valentine was a staunch and pious Mennonite and was chosen minister and bishop. He served the church faithfully, reared a large family, which married in the Mennonite Church, before he died July 24, 1783.¹

Their son Jacob, 1755-1814, married Maria Hess of the Hess congregation. They settled in West Earl Township in 1786 on a seventy-acre farm. They buried a small daughter in a plot on their farm which eventually became the burial ground of Metzlers congregation. Their son, Jacob II, sold the plot to the trustees

of the congregation on May 26, 1827, for burial ground and church purposes. The church built on this plot has since become known as Metzlers Mennonite Meeting House.²

The History of the Church Buildings

The trustees to whom Jacob Metzler II sold the plot of land were Jacob Nolt, Christian Meyer, Jr., and Henry Stoner. The deed of conveyance is a very interesting one. In addition to containing a description of the sixty perches of land, the long recital gives directions as to the manner of proceeding for the election of trustees:

"In trust to and for the only proper use purpose and intent of a burial ground and Menonist Meeting House to be erected and built on the hereby

granted lot of ground, and further in trust to and for the only proper use and intent that the society of Mennonists or the regular members of the said society who shall attend public worship at or in the said meeting house shall have a right to assemble annually in the said meeting house on the first Monday in May of each and every year hereafter for the purpose of electing by ballot, three trustees for the ensuing year, and until other trustees shall be elected, public verbal notice of such election shall be given to the members of the said society at the two meetings held in said meeting house next preceding such day on which the election is to be held. Such notice is to be given by the preacher or either of the elders of the said society assembling for public worship at said meeting house."³

No person, except he be a member of the "society of Mennonites," could serve as a trustee. NonMennonites could be buried in the graveyard,



METZLERS MEETINGHOUSE

but no nonMennonite could preach in the church except on the occasion of a funeral. The trustees named as grantees in the deed were also appointed as managers to erect and build the meetinghouse.⁴

The date when the construction of the meetinghouse began cannot be accurately determined. If it was not begun in 1827 it must have been shortly afterwards, because it was completed by May 8, 1830. The first church building was of frame and log construction and its dimensions were 28 by 30 feet. It was almost square, thus following the European style of architecture for Mennonite meetinghouses. Its cost was \$420.24. The money was obtained by donation from members of the "Mennonite Society." In amount the donations ranged from \$2 to \$40, with fifty-five people making contributions. The most common names among the donors were: Nolt, Wenger, Metzler, Meyer, Stoner, Rupp, Groff, Burkholder, Hurst, Weaver, and Wolf.⁵

This was the first Mennonite meetinghouse in the immediate community. Prior to this time the Mennonites in this area worshipped in homes or at the Groffdale meetinghouse, located six miles to the southeast. Metzlers was in a circuit with Groffdale and the Pike meetinghouse, located a short distance east of Hinkletown on the Harrisburg Road. The latter meetinghouse is six miles northeast of Metzlers and is now occupied by the Stauffer and Weaver Mennonites. Services were held at each place every three weeks. This circuit continued until 1847 when the Stauffer Mennonites withdrew from the main group and occupied the Pike meetinghouse.

The schism came about when a difference of opinion arose in the Groffdale congregation as to the extent and nature of confession required and the discipline to be meted out to a brother and sister accused of harsh and cruel treatment of an orphan girl adopted into their family. Sides were taken throughout the brotherhood which seriously divided the ministerial group and even the bishops of the district. In February, 1846, an edict or plan of reconciliation was issued by the board of bishops. This was signed by all the bishops except Jacob Brubaker of the Juniata district.

The two leaders of the group who did not agree with the bishops were Jacob Stauffer and Jacob Weber, ministers of the Groffdale "bench." They presented a carefully written answer to the bishops at a meeting which was called to reconcile the differences. The dissident group decided to withdraw and named Jacob Brubaker as their bishop. With-

out any dispute the mother church allowed them to have the Pike meetinghouse. After this event Metzlers and Groffdale operated on a circuit on which services were held alternately at the two places. This practice lasted until approximately fifteen years ago when services began every Sunday at both places.

The original church building served the purposes of the congregation until 1864. At this time a fifteen-foot addition was made to the church building. Also eighty-five perches of land were bought and added to the original plot. The trustees at this time were Daniel Meyer, Jacob S. Metzler, and Isaac Burkholder. The cost of the land and building was \$526.23. Donations received amounted to \$636.78.⁵

A special clause in the recital of the deed which conveyed the eighty-five perches of land to the trustees stated that the land should return to the grantors in case it should be abandoned by the "Mennonite Society":

"And further subject to and reserving that if at any time the said premises shall not be used or occupied by the said Mennonite Society as and for their uses and purposes, as herein declared and set forth with intention of perpetual abandonment of the same, in that case, the hereby granted premises shall descend to and reverse back to the said Jacob Metzler his heirs and assigns of the adjoining premise."⁷

In the last decade of the nineteenth century it was decided that the frame and log church building, which had served the congregation seventy years, was no longer suitable. The original building was razed and a new one constructed of brick, sixty-two feet in length, was erected in its place. The cost of this building, together with thirty-one perches of land purchased from Barbara L. Metzler, amounted to \$2,621.83. The cost again was met by donations from the members. The building committee was composed of Jacob Stoner, president; John Metzler, treasurer; and Noah Mack, secretary. The trustees at the time were Abraham Stoner, John Sauder, and Samuel Metzler.

This building had a basement which provided for the meeting of Sunday school classes. The first Sunday school at Metzlers was held in April 1897. Along with the new building the congregation also acquired new hymnbooks, *Hymns and Tunes*. These were used for about twelve years when the *Church Hymnal* was substituted. These are still used at present.

The 1897 building (except for the basement) remained in its original form until 1952, when it was remodeled and a twenty-two foot an-

nex made to the west. This, together with further excavation under the main building, provided additional Sunday school room and seating space at the time of large meetings. A new heating system and lavatories were installed. The old portion was veneered with a layer of new bricks. The cost of the remodeling program was \$26,375.27, and again the outlay was met by donations from the members. The members of the building committee were Robert Benner, president; Christian High, treasurer; Elmer Metzler, secretary; Roy Zimmerman, and Elam Witmer. The present church building is an attractive brick building, surrounded by a number of large shade trees. Its architecture is simple and functionally well adapted for its purposes.

The Leaders of the Congregation

Bishops. The first bishop of Metzlers was Jacob Zimmerman. He was the third resident bishop of the Weaverland-Groffdale District. He was ordained in 1815 as an assistant to Henry Martin and upon the death of the latter served until 1856. Zimmerman's successor was George Weaver, a fifth generation descendant of Henry Weber, the first settler in the Weaverland area. He was chosen bishop in 1854 and was known as a tactful and forceful leader in the congregations. During his twenty-nine years of service the membership increased greatly in numbers.

Jonas H. Martin became the third bishop in the district in 1881. It is imperative to take a brief look at the schism which developed during his years of service. At the time in 1871 when the Lancaster Conference passed a resolution in favor of Sunday schools George Weaver was the leader of the opposition to the movement. However, many farsighted men in the Weaverland-Groffdale District foresaw the necessity of English preaching and longed for the opportunity to teach young people special Bible lessons in that language. The sentiments in favor of Sunday schools and the English language grew and were accepted by a large majority of the members. The ministerial board, however, changed more slowly.

In 1893, at the fall conference Jonas Martin announced that he with many of his members were not in union with certain articles and practices of the conference. Among these was the article allowing Sunday schools to be held. The board of bishops plead with him and his group to accept the articles for the sake of harmony and the good of the church. However, he would not be moved, so that the board finally

deposed him of his bishop responsibilities and withdrew his charge as a minister of the Mennonite Church. Bishop Martin and his supporters met and adopted a series of rulings and regulations designed to provide stricter discipline and more conservativeness. They gathered into the new organization about one-third of the members of the Weaverland-Groffdale District, which has since become known as "The Weaverland Conference." A number of members from Metzlers joined this new body. This group is still active, but their membership has declined and many of their number have returned to the mother church.

Between the years of 1893 and 1902 no resident bishop served the Weaverland-Groffdale District. In 1902 Benjamin Weaver, nephew of former bishop George Weaver, was ordained as bishop. He was in charge of the congregations during the time of World War I which brought on many perplexing problems. He presided over his flock diligently and labored tirelessly until his death in 1928.

Benjamin Weaver had a very capable and outstanding leader for his assistant. He was Noah H. Mack. Mack was ordained to the ministry at Groffdale in 1900, and in 1919 he became bishop-assistant to Brother Weaver. He held this office until 1926, when he accepted a call from the Adams-York County District to serve as bishop. However, he retained his residence in New Holland and kept an active interest in his earlier field of labor, continuing to fill preaching engagements there. Even before his ordination to the ministry, Brother Mack contributed much as a lay member to Metzlers. He was a leading figure in the building program of 1897; he was actively interested in the Sunday school movement and had much to do with the organization of the first school in April 1897. Bro. Mack passed on to his reward October 30, 1948 at the ripe old age of eighty-seven years.

Noah Mack was succeeded at the time he took up the charge in Adams-York County District by John M. Sauder. Brother Sauder was ordained bishop in 1928 and served until his death in 1939. Shortly before his death, Bro. Sauder made plans to divide his district into two separate sections. This was not carried through in his time but when he died two bishops were ordained. Mahlon Witmer was ordained for the Groffdale district and J. Paul Graybill for the Weaverland District. This marked the division of the Weaverland-Groffdale District. Bro. Witmer is presently the bishop of the Groffdale District and resides at New Holland. He serves the

seven congregations in the district: Groffdale, Metzlers, New Holland, Carpenters, Hinkletown, Fraser, and Palo Alto.

Ministers. The first minister to take charge of the religious life of the Mennonites at Metzlers was William Westhafer. He lived near Fairmount in West Earl Township and had been ordained at Groffdale soon after 1810. He preached in private homes in the Metzlers community long before the first meetinghouse was built. He served until 1826 when he moved to Cumberland County.

Probably the first minister to preach in the Metzlers meetinghouse was Jacob Weber, who was ordained for the district soon after Westhafer left. Weber served at Metzlers and the Pike until 1846 when he cast his lot with the Stauffer branch of the church. Jacob Stauffer, ordained in 1840, also joined the Stauffer group after laboring at Metzlers six years.

Abraham Martin, who was ordained in October, 1847, to fill the vacancies left by Weber and Stauffer, served until 1889 when he died at the age of ninety-one years. At that time he was the oldest minister in the Mennonite church in the County. Martin's assistant and successor was Joseph Wenger; he was killed in 1907 when struck by a train. He was the senior member of the ministerial board of the District and travelled extensively in the interest of the church. During Wenger's period Elias Nolt served as minister from 1868 to 1900. Nolt held progressive views and was an ardent supporter of the Sunday school movement.

On December 26, 1895, Isaiah Witmer was chosen to assist Wenger and Nolt who were both well along in years. Witmer was able, after he became senior minister, to retire from other duties and devote his entire time to the work of the church. He died in 1937.

Benjamin G. Wenger, grandfather of the writer, was ordained in 1908 and served the Ephrata congregation along with Metzlers and Groffdale. Devoting much time to evangelistic work and special meetings throughout the County, he was highly respected by fellow ministers and the laity. He died in 1942. Banks Winey must also be mentioned. He moved into the community as an ordained man in 1910 and labored among his brethren until his death in 1918.

The living ministers who have been called to serve the Metzlers and Groffdale congregations are: Eli G. Sauder, Amos H. Sauder, Lester Hoover, John Martin, and Paul S. Wenger. Eli Sauder was ordained in 1920 and has served at both con-

gregations for thirty-seven years. In 1940 Amos H. Sauder, Jr. was ordained to serve both congregations. Lester Hoover was ordained at Groffdale in 1944 but more recently has taken the pastoral responsibility at the Palo Alto mission church. In 1949 two ministers were ordained: John Martin at Groffdale and Paul Wenger at Metzlers. Although they are primarily responsible for the respective congregations at Groffdale and Metzlers, they occasionally preach in each other's pulpit. Brother Wenger, uncle of the writer, was the first minister to be ordained at Metzlers. All the previous ministers were ordained at Groffdale.

Deacons. Through the years a number of deacons have served the Metzlers congregation. They have been: Abraham Burkholder, Benjamin Wenger, Abraham B. Kendig, John H. Martin, Michael W. Nolt, Samuel Metzler, Amos B. Sauder, and Paul H. Weaver. In 1905, beginning with Samuel Metzler, deacons were chosen at Metzlers, rather than at Groffdale as had been the case heretofore. Paul H. Weaver, ordained in 1944, is the present deacon.

Outreach of the Congregation

An instance of interest in relief work on the part of Metzlers is on record for the years 1874-75. At this time many Russian Mennonites were leaving Russia and coming to North America. Most of them were poverty stricken and in physical need in general. The members of the congregation at this time took the opportunity to help their Mennonite brethren. Two collections taken, one in 1874 and another one in 1875, raised a total of \$457.00, of which \$132.58 was later paid back.

Through the years many of the members at Metzlers have engaged in mission outreach. Mr. and Mrs. John W. Hess served at several mission points in the Midwest. Amanda Musselman, from the Groffdale congregation but who also attended Metzlers, spent twenty-five years at city missions in Chicago and Philadelphia. Mr. and Mrs. Levi Sauder gave a term of service at the Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission and Millersville Children's Home. Mr. and Mrs. John H. Weaver also spent two years at Welsh Mountain Industrial Mission. Mabel Weaver Manner was a worker for a number of years at Reading and Philadelphia. Minnie Eberly Holsopple served in the South. Barbara Eberly has been at the Johnstown mission. More recently Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Horst have spent a term of service in Belgium and one in Tanganyika.

Members from Metzlers have been influential in establishing several local outposts. Benjamin G. Wenger and Samuel Metzler, with other

members, helped to start the Ephrata congregation. Members from Metzlers helped to establish the Carpenters congregation near Brownstown. The Hinkletown congregation is for the most part an outgrowth of Metzlers. Esther Melling Bair, who pioneered in Summer Bible School in the Metzlers area was instrumental in opening work at Hinkletown. A Christian Workers' Band, begun in 1948, provided an avenue of service for the young people of the congregation. They have contributed much time and effort to the Palo Alto Mission at Pottsville in Center County, Pennsylvania, in the form of monthly jail services and the distribution of gospel literature. They also participate in street meetings and services at convalescent homes in Philadelphia.

The 1957 Meeting of the Historical Committee

The annual meeting of the Historical Committee of General Conference was held this year on April 6 at Goshen College. Last year the Committee was the guest of Samuel S. Wenger at Paradise, Pa., and next year, the Lord willing, it will meet at Eastern Mennonite College.

The members present this year were Harold Bauman, H. S. Bender, J. A. Hostetler, Ira D. Landis, N. P. Springer (proxy for Melvin Gingerich), J. C. Wenger, Samuel S. Wenger, and Gideon Yoder. Three were absent: Ernest R. Clemens, Paul Peachey, and Grant Stoltzfus. The Committee's membership of ten is appointed by General Conference. In 1956 two members, Ernest R. Clemens and J. C. Fretz, were co-opted. Due to the decease of Bro. Fretz during the past year the Committee co-opted Irvin B. Horst at its 1957 meeting. The officers of the Committee are: H. S. Bender, Chairman; J. C. Wenger, Secretary; and Ira D. Landis, Treasurer.

Items of business transacted at the 1957 meeting, as taken from the secretary's minutes, are the following:

3. Moved and carried to authorize the secretary to send a letter of condolence to the widow of our late committee member, J. C. Fretz.

4. The Chairman reported that Harvey Snyder and Paul Burkholder are working on the disposition of the S. F. Coffman papers, the task on which J. C. Fretz was laboring when he passed away. Our Chairman has counseled with the brethren Snyder and Burkholder in their task.

9. The Chairman reported on the proposal of Walter Eisenbeiss, a Lutheran who became a Mennonite through MCC influence, that he translate some Anabaptist documents from German into English.

13. Moved and carried to extend

FOOTNOTES

¹ Book M-M, pp. 77-80, Recorder's Office, Lancaster County Courthouse.

² For Valentine Metzler see Ira D. Landis, "Fifty Mennonite Leaders: Valentine Metzler," *Gospel Herald* (Jan. 3, 1955, p. 846).

³ Book F-5-552, Lancaster County Courthouse.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Statements of donations and expenses in possession of Reuben Horst.

⁶ Statements in possession of Reuben Horst.

⁷ Book K-9-39, Lancaster County Courthouse.

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J. Paul Graybill, et al., *Noah H. Mack, His Life and Times 1861-1948* (Published by Lancaster Conference and printed at Scottsdale, Pa., n.d., [1952]).

Ira D. Landis, "Fifty Mennonite Leaders: Valentine Metzler," *Gospel Herald* (Jan. 3, 1955, p. 846).

Marlin G. Weaver, *Mennonites of Lancaster Conference* (Scottsdale, 1931).

Deed recorded in the Lancaster County Courthouse.

MS papers in possession of Reuben Horst.

MS papers in possession of Elmer Metzler.

Interview with Amanda S. Wenger.

a vote of thanks to Walter E. Oswald, both for his regular services as Archivist and for his donated labor after his resignation.

15. and 16. John A. Hostetler gave his report as editor of *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*. It was agreed in reference to the *Bulletin*:

- To print enough copies to have a surplus stock of about 200 copies of each issue.
- To give five complimentary copies to writers of articles.
- To send no extra copies to associate editors unless requested.
- Moved and passed to invite Irvin B. Horst to serve as editor for the coming biennium, and J. A. Hostetler as assistant editor.

17. Harold S. Bender, editor, reported on *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*. All the manuscripts, pictures, and maps for Volume III have been submitted to Mennonite Publishing House. It is hoped to have Volume III off the press by July 1, 1957.

18. H. S. Bender reported that the publication of the *Täuferakten* volumes has been delayed by a slow delivery of manuscripts by authors. Two small volumes of Hans Denk materials have appeared. Other volumes of Alsatian and Hutterite materials are currently in preparation.

19. It was agreed to ask the Secretary of our Committee to communicate our desire to see our ministers secure *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* to our district conference officers, and to prepare a letter to be made available to our Sunday school librarians for mailing out by Mennonite Publishing House.

21. It was agreed to appoint Melvin Gingerich to manage the Mennonite History Essay Contest for the 1957-59 biennium, with J. C. Wenger

caring for the work until Gingerich returns.

23. John A. Hostetler reported on the proposed History of Mennonite Publishing House. Suggestions were made for the enrichment of the volume.

24. John A. Hostetler solicited suggestions for the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the House. H. S. Bender pledged the readiness of the Historical Committee to help in any possible way. Perhaps a traveling exhibit could be taken from one district conference to another. Could our Publishing House issue a pictorial volume on our churches and institutions? A few maps could be included.

25. The Committee re-elected Harold S. Bender to another four-year term on the General Council, 1957-1961.

32. Harold S. Bender exhibited Volume 25 of *The Christian Classics* which is devoted to "the Radical Reformation." The Committee felt that we should still go ahead with our plans for an Anabaptist reader.

35. Ira D. Landis reported the creation of a historical committee in the Washington-Franklin District, with Roy M. Showalter, Maugansville, Md., as chairman.

36. The Committee authorized its officers to arrange for a meeting of district conference historians for mutual stimulation and helpfulness.

37. The Committee went on record as favoring the translation and publication in English of N. van der Zijpp's Dutch history of the Dutch Mennonites.

42. The Committee agreed to the removal of the Archives from the Memorial Library to the proposed new seminary building, and authorized the Chairman and Secretary to abrogate the agreement now in effect as between the Historical Committee and the Board of Education, and to negotiate a new agreement locating the Archives in the Seminary Building, provided no financial obligation to the Historical Committee is incurred thereby. The proposed quarters for the Archives involves a substantial increase in space for the Archives, for which the Historical Committee is deeply grateful.

43. Moved and carried to approve the layout of space in the new Archives arrangement, and to empower the Chairman and Secretary to plan further in this area.

44. It was agreed to ask H. S. Bender, Melvin Gingerich and N. P. Springer to serve as an Equipment Committee to make definite plans for the equipment of the Archives in the Seminary Building.

47. Attention was called to Ira D. Landis' new book, *The Lancaster Mennonite Conference, History and Background*, 1956.

